

July 2024

2024 Immigrant Justice Platform

Our Vision



Purpose

The Center for Popular Democracy's Immigration Team prepared this document as a companion to [2024 CPD Immigration Platform: Our Work](#).¹ Together, these two documents outline the overarching values and strategies that guide the CPD Network's immigration campaigns, reflect our affiliates and their members' vision and priorities, and provide consistent language for narrative and political education immigration work. Intended audiences for these documents include CPD staff, affiliates, our members, policymakers, journalists, and funders.

Who We Are

[The Center for Popular Democracy \(CPD\)](#) builds the power of communities to ensure the country embodies our vision of an inclusive, equitable society – where people of color, immigrants, working families, women, and LGBTQ+ communities thrive together, supported by a resilient economy and political institutions that reflect our priorities. To this end, CPD has designated campaign teams focused on specific issues affecting the communities we serve, including an Immigration campaign. Fifty-three affiliate

organizations across 34 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C., comprise the CPD Network.

The Current Context

In the current political context of anti-immigrant narratives and misinformation, we must continue to build and showcase the power and diversity of immigrant communities in the U.S. Political parties exploit the issue of immigration for political gain every election year. But our communities know that beneath the posturing, immigration policies have life-or-death implications for real people.

Although it's crucial to continue fighting harmful proposals,² we must also be clear on our vision of what immigration means to this country and how intrinsically it ties to many issues that affect not only immigrants but all of us. **Below, we outline some guiding principles that CPD and our affiliates hope to center as we do immigration justice work.**

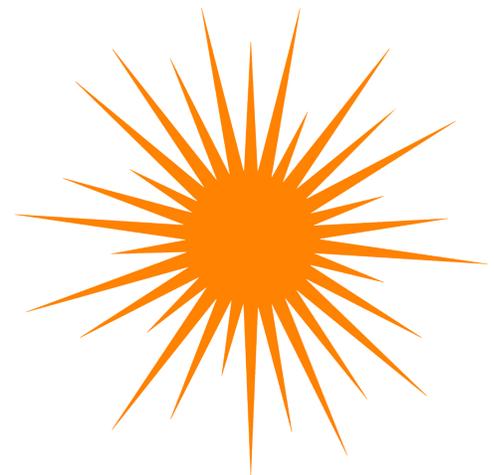


There are currently over 46 million immigrant and refugee community members living in the United States, including over 11 million undocumented Americans,³ many of whom have lived here for decades and are our family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. However, for all their contributions to our communities, many immigrants live in a state of limbo, unsure if someone will come overnight to take away the lives they have worked so hard to build. They face the constant threat of deportation and family separation as they struggle for basic labor protections, living wages, and access to health, education, and housing, all while raising their families and doing essential work that sustains our country. Millions face further uncertainties due to the current immigration case backlog crisis.⁴

Our immigrant communities have faced unprecedented, escalating attacks on and violations of their basic dignity and safety, including under Trump-era policies, some of which were continued and even expanded on by the current administration.⁵ (In June 2024, relenting to “decades of tireless organizing and advocacy,” the current administration announced protections for “roughly half a million spouses of U.S. citizens, including eligible DACA recipients, from deportation [and] access to work authorization and a possible path to permanent residency and citizenship.”⁶) It is terrifying to witness the rise of white supremacy, dehumanizing rhetoric, and open calls for fascism in the United States as we approach another pivotal election.⁷ But as frightening and disheartening as the current moment is, these anti-immigrant policies and scapegoating are nothing new.

Our Historical Perspective

U.S. immigration policy is inextricably linked to racism. Up until 1965, it was the official policy of the U.S. Government to encourage immigration from select European countries and discourage or bar migrants of color from entering the country in service of a white supremacist idea of who should be considered “American.”⁸ It has become an



ironic feature of our immigration debate that many of the descendants of past waves of immigration from Europe are some of the most fervent opponents to immigration today.

The bedrock of U.S. immigration policy has been to keep out the “other.” In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act targeted Chinese immigrants for restriction—the first such group identified by race and class for severely limited legal entry and ineligibility for citizenship. The Immigration Act of 1917 established a “barred zone” extending from the



Middle East to Southeast Asia from which no one was allowed to enter the United States and also implemented English literacy tests intended to limit “undesirable” groups from Southern and Eastern Europe—Catholics and Jews.⁹ The Immigration Act of 1924 established discriminatory, country-based quotas; this remained the primary means of determining admission to the U.S. for immigrants until 1965.¹⁰

During the 1950s, so-called “Operation Wetback” was a militarized campaign that rounded up perceived Mexican nationals (and scores of U.S. citizens) in the Southwest

U.S. and pushed them over the border into Mexico.¹¹ Later, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 provided a path to permanent residency and “naturalization” for millions, but at the same time, contributed to more militarization and enforcement at the southern border and a more stringent system of proof of residency/citizenship required for workers to gain “legal” employment.¹²

One constant feature of anti-immigrant policy and rhetoric in the U.S. has been to treat the act of migration and the people migrating as a *problem*—of criminality and legality, often couched in terms of economic or safety concerns—rather than a *solution*: as a natural result of the human need and desire to move, or as the inevitable outcome, ironically, of U.S. economic and foreign policy such as NAFTA, support for death squads in Central America and dictatorships in South America, the invasion and destabilization of Iraq and the region, et cetera. **Casting immigration – especially from certain countries – as a problem or crime to be solved led to racist enforcement becoming the “solution.” This bipartisan consensus¹³ gained traction over the past decades hand-in-hand with neoliberal austerity and mass incarceration;** “the justifications used to target immigrants are based on the same long-standing beliefs that have criminalized other marginalized groups for decades.”¹⁴



Criminalizing the very foreign-born workers demanded by big business is a key feature of disciplining the working class overall.¹⁵

An often overlooked feature of the oppression of immigrants in the U.S. is anti-Black racism. There are more than 600,000 Black undocumented people in the U.S. and about 4 million Black immigrants overall.¹⁶ They are

twice as likely to be deported as non-Black undocumented immigrants and account for 20% of the population facing deportation on “criminal” grounds despite representing under 9% of the undocumented population.¹⁷ “Our anti-Black and xenophobic immigration system is entangled with our racist criminal legal system,”

putting Black immigrants into a life of “double jeopardy” as they are targeted and profiled by both local law enforcement and immigration enforcement officials. This dynamic is only made worse by programs such as 287(G) that deputize local police as immigration agents and by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (“IIRIRA”) and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (“AEDPA”).¹⁸ Indeed, we can think of the white backlash to migration from Mexico, Central America, and other majority-people of color countries as mirroring and having roots in the backlash to another, earlier mass migration: the “Great Migration” of Black Americans escaping racial terror and discrimination in the South by moving to cities in the North, Midwest, and Western U.S.¹⁹

Our Values

We believe all people have inherent value and deserve to be treated as whole persons. The decision to migrate is not made lightly and is often driven by untenable conditions. **Everyone deserves the freedom to stay** – to remain rooted in the communities and countries where they were born and raised alongside family and friends. But if this becomes impossible due to economic, political, or other conditions, **everyone also deserves the right to move, migrate, and participate fully in the country where they live.** We will only be free when immigrants are no longer exploited, scapegoated, or living in fear of a detention and deportation regime that rips apart families and communities. We will only be free when we recognize that our diversity is one of our country’s oldest and greatest strengths.



Our Values

CPD's vision for immigrant liberation – and the liberation of all people – is grounded in the "Five Freedoms" imagined by the nearly 50 immigrant justice leaders who participated in the *Immigrant Movement Visioning Process* in 2018–19:

All people have inherent dignity and value. Everyone should be able to live in safe and healthy conditions, protected equally under the law. Every human being deserves to embrace their complex histories and backgrounds, to dream, love, imagine, and achieve peace and liberation. We believe that migration policies must be grounded in racial, economic, and gender equity and justice.

- **Freedom to Thrive.** *All people should have equal agency to make decisions about their lives, relationships, community, and future.*
- **Freedom to Stay.** *All people have the right to stay and belong in the place they call home.*
- **Freedom to Move.** *All people should have the freedom to move equitably and be welcomed.*
- **Freedom to Work.** *All people deserve the right to safe, fulfilling, and dignified work.*
- **Freedom to Transform.** *All people have inherent value and deserve to be treated as whole persons.*

We believe that immigration enriches our country in every sense of the word. Contrary to the cynical scarcity ideology that pits marginalized communities against each other, immigration increases and sustains the country's economic growth. In 2024, the Congressional Budget Office estimated that immigration will boost US GDP by \$7

trillion over the next decade.²⁰ In addition to contributing millions of dollars annually through taxes, immigrants labor in various industries and businesses, including many that deem them essential workers. **But beyond their economic contributions, immigrants are whole persons who are invaluable to our families, institutions, communities, and movements.** Their language, traditions, and cultural practices enrich us all.

Our Strategy

We must not give in to hopelessness and apathy. **We must maintain our long-term vision and values and trust that they will outlive the short-term expediency of the current political moment. This long-term vision must be nurtured through *narrative change, electoral work, litigation, and advocacy and direct action*, as well as by continuing to build our movement's power and visibility.**

Narrative change

It is essential to maintain a continued focus on narrative change to counteract the barrage of dehumanizing anti-immigration rhetoric flooding the public square and political arena. This means sharing immigrants' stories in their own words and highlighting their challenges navigating a country and a system that aims to isolate and punish them while also uplifting the joy they experience with their families and communities across the U.S. **This also includes striking a balance between noting immigrants' essential economic contributions and emphasizing that their worth as**

individuals is not limited to the value of their labor. Our advocacy must also reflect the diversity of the immigrant experience, recognizing that immigration policy is not just simply a Latine issue but also profoundly impacts Black, Muslim, Arab, African, Asian, LGBTQ+, and other communities, and the countless people for whom two or more of



these identities overlap. We recognize that just as the immigrant community is not racially, ethnically, or religiously homogeneous, there's also significant variation in how and when individuals arrive in the U.S.

We must advocate for the entirety of the immigrant community and not buy into a scarcity mindset or divisive “*good/deserving vs. bad/criminal* immigrant” framing within our movement. **No immigrant is more or less worthy than another.** This type of thinking is a distraction from the work that needs to be done to defeat the oppressive systems that threaten us all.

Intersectionality

Immigrants are not just affected by immigration policy. Immigrant communities often bear the brunt of a myriad of other issues, including housing unaffordability, lack of access to healthcare, violations of labor rights, substandard wages, discrimination in the education system, and increased policing, surveillance and criminal enforcement.²¹ The constant attacks on civil rights and liberties and racist rhetoric that characterizes the anti-immigrant movement are part of a broader, deep-seated threat to our society. This is why our immigrant justice campaign supports state and local work on a range of issues, including access to housing, healthcare, education, and labor rights. **The issue of immigration and immigrant communities themselves cannot be siloed. The liberation of immigrants connects to the liberation of everyone.**

Electoralizing Immigration

As we recognize the intersectionality of immigration, we also cannot shy away from explicitly naming immigration as a priority issue for our communities. In an election year such as 2024, this includes electoralizing immigration. Candidates and elected officials at every level, whether federal, state, or local, must face accountability for how their rhetoric and actions (or lack thereof) directly impact immigrant communities. As we continue to grow the power of our affiliates and members, immigration policy must continue to be front and center, whether seeking support for pro-immigrant

proposals or responding to anti-immigrant attacks.

Litigation

At the federal level, litigation has been an invaluable tool to fight back against anti-immigrant attacks, particularly during the Trump administration, helping to preserve programs like TPS and DACA. At the state level, the use of litigation has been crucial in pushing back against, or at least pausing the implementation of, anti-immigrant laws in places like Florida and Texas.²² Unfortunately, the ultimate fate of some of these key cases might not hinge on the validity of substantive legal arguments but on the personal views of anti-immigrant judges. This is particularly concerning in the case of the Supreme Court of the U.S., which has been shown to have severe conflicts of interest.²³ This is part of the reason why CPD has an ongoing campaign focused on Supreme Court reform, which is broader than the immigration campaign but could have an impact on the outcome of future immigration cases.

Advocacy and Direct Action

Our advocacy work and direct action tactics are driven by those most impacted by immigration policies. Although litigation and other tools can provide a powerful last resort when Congress fails to act or the executive branch overreaches, we cannot stay



on the defensive or settle for minimum protections; we must put forward and fight for our affirmative vision for the future. We train, organize, and mobilize organizations and members across the country to take powerful, decisive action on decision-makers.

Nurturing the power and sustainability of the movement

The immigrant justice movement needs to be rooted in affected communities and strive to care for each other as much as for any specific advocacy goals. We must continue to share tools and recognize the diversity of skills and experiences within our organizations.

SUPPORT OUR WORK

If you would like to receive more information about our vision and strategy for 2024, please contact *National Immigration Organizer* **Tony Alarcon** at [**talarcon@populardemocracy.org**](mailto:talarcon@populardemocracy.org) or *Senior Policy Strategist* **Iris Figueroa** at [**ifigueroa@populardemocracy.org**](mailto:ifigueroa@populardemocracy.org)

Endnotes

1. See <link to report page on CPD site>
2. Some of the current policies, narratives and proposals we are fighting against include the bipartisan [scapegoating of immigrants and asylum seekers to score political points](#); [H.R. 7343, a redundant, fearmongering bill](#) that would subject immigrants to mandatory detention for being accused of, arrested for, charged with or convicted of assaulting a law enforcement officer; new attempts to include a [citizenship status question in the 2030 Census](#); and a [major expansion of the FISA warrantless spying program](#) that would target immigrants.
3. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-2024>
4. <https://www.uscis.gov/EOY2023>
5. <https://jacobin.com/2024/02/biden-immigration-bill-hypocrisy-trump>
6. https://americasvoice.org/press_releases/following-decades-of-tireless-organizing-and-advocacy-immigrant-and-civil-rights-groups-win-historic-relief-for-immigrant-families/
7. <https://www.axios.com/2023/11/13/trump-vermin-fascist-language-speech>
8. See Daniel Denvir, *All-American Nativism: How the Bipartisan War on Immigrants Explains Politics as We Know It* (Verso, 2020), pp 4-5; <https://americanhistory.si.edu/becoming-us/sites/default/files/case-study/downloads/HartCeller%20readings%20and%20handouts.pdf>; <https://www.npr.org/2015/10/03/445339838/the-unintended-consequences-of-the-1965-immigration-act>
9. <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/feb/05>; <https://immigrationhistory.org/timeline/>
10. <https://immigrationhistory.org/timeline/>
11. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/01/politics/trump-immigration-what-matters/index.html>
12. <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/irca>
13. <https://www.nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/border-crises/>
14. See Silky Shah, *Unbuild Walls: Why Immigrant Justice Needs Abolition* (Haymarket, 2024), pp 8-10
15. See Denvir, *All-American Nativism*, pp 7-9.
16. <https://afsc.org/news/immigration-black-issue>
17. <https://prismreports.org/2024/04/15/immigration-narratives-erase-black-undocumented-immigrants/>; <https://afsc.org/news/immigration-black-issue>
18. <https://afsc.org/news/immigration-black-issue>
19. See Denvir, *All-American Nativism*, pp 3-7; <https://thebaffler.com/latest/impossible-contradictions-oconnor>
20. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-08/immigration-to-boost-us-gdp-by-7-trillion-over-decade-cbo-says>
21. <https://time.com/6336882/police-surveillance-history/>; <https://prismreports.org/2024/01/09/surveillance-capitalism-taken-over-immigration-enforcement/>; <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/impact-discrimination-early-schooling-experiences-children-immigrant-families>
22. <https://www.texastribune.org/2024/03/19/texas-sb-4-illegal-immigration/>
23. <https://fixthecourt.com/2024/05/recent-times-justice-failed-recuse-despite-clear-conflict-interest/>

